

April 2008

Interview with Wayne Michaud, Director of Idle- Free VT for Community College of Vermont Research Project by Kristi K. Ameden

1.) What made you decide to start Idle-Free VT?

As an adult, I'd always had a consciousness of wasteful idling. In the early 1980's, I'd be in a fast food drive-through line, accompanied by my wife and young son. Despite some chiding from them, I'd shut off the engine and restart as needed. I would usually win the gamble of not idling, sitting for more than 20 to 30 seconds before I had to move up to the pickup window. I saved gas! But this unusual practice didn't extend into other areas of limiting idling, such as short engine warm-ups in winter. Nor was there an awareness of air quality concerns.

Much more recently in 2004, a friend, knowledgeable in energy issues, made me aware of the theory of peak oil, the peaking of world oil production. He explained that oil, a fossil fuel, is a finite resource. And he explained, as many geologists have, how the demand for oil, as more developing and advancing countries place a demand on it, will inevitably exceed supply, most likely within the next few years. The decline of oil supplies that would follow peak oil could have very serious consequences.

Shortly thereafter, I observed vehicles idling at a CSWD (Chittenden Solid Waste District) recycling/trash disposal dropoff center. One vehicle in particular idled for at least 10 minutes. I was fairly dumbfounded by this and wrote a letter to the editor of the Burlington Free Press who published it. I also contacted CSWD about it. They took a genuine interest and went so far as to design no-idle signs to be placed at all their dropoff centers. The idea that one person could have this much impact gratified me. With the encouragement of ACoRN—the Addison County Relocalization Network, a newly formed post carbon/localization group that I was a member of, I considered ways of raising awareness of unnecessary idling in my greater community and started Idle-Free VT.

2.) How long ago was it started?

July 2006.

3.) How does your organization help Vermonters limit their idling?

Idle-Free VT raises awareness in several ongoing ways. First, with the web site which has steadily seen increased visits, now up to 1500 a month. Second, through the media (letters to the editor, op-eds, press releases and radio public service announcements). Third, petition drives, both on-location and through the web site. Other ways have been lobbying the state legislature to pass idling bills, running campaigns within the campaign such as Business Idle-Free, and even one-to-one by informing drivers of parked idling vehicles with information handouts. In most of these efforts, I have had the help of other dedicated individuals.

4.) Do you feel people take idling seriously?

An American Lung Assoc. of Vermont lobbyist that I have worked with and who taught me many things about effective campaigning and lobbying explained that the process of getting people to be aware of idling and breaking long established habits is a slow one, equating it with the slow, messy process of "sausage making". While the vast majority of people don't think about the impacts of idling, I believe that more are aware of idling as, first, the media has given the issue more coverage than previous to the Idle-Free VT campaign and, second, the enactment of Vermont's school bus idling law has surely made an informative difference in the school environment.

5.) Do you think there should be an anti- idling law in Vermont? If so, how should it be written?

Yes, I do. Currently, there is a limited state idling law in Vermont: Act 48—the idling of motor vehicle engines on school property. This limits the idling of school buses on school property; The law also allows school boards to set an idling policy in their school districts for vehicles other than school buses. Idle-Free VT advocates an all motor vehicle idling law. As listed on the Idle-Free VT web site, here is the language, which is similar to all motor vehicle idling laws in Massachusetts and in municipalities of Canada:

No person shall allow in the State of Vermont any motor vehicle that is designed to operate on public roads to idle in excess of three (3) consecutive minutes in any 60 minute period for gasoline-powered vehicles; five (5) consecutive minutes in any 60 minute period for diesel-powered vehicles, with the following exceptions:_(1) The vehicle is forced to remain motionless on a public road because of traffic conditions over which the operator has no control;_(2) The vehicle is being used as an emergency vehicle in an emergency situation;_(3) Required by a federal, state, or local law or official, but only to the extent necessary to comply with such requirement;_(4) The vehicle's engine is providing auxiliary power for activities other than heating or air conditioning, such as loading, refrigeration, well drilling, or farming;_(5) Running the vehicle's engine is necessary for maintenance, servicing, repair, or diagnostic purposes;_(6) Running the vehicle's engine during adverse weather conditions is necessary to ensure the safe operation of the vehicle; or_(7) The ambient air temperature is below 20 degrees Fahrenheit for gasoline-powered vehicles; below 32 degrees Fahrenheit for diesel-powered vehicles, and idling of the vehicle is necessary to ensure the safety or health of the passengers or driver.

6.) Do you think there are any reasons we should not have an anti- idling law in Vermont?

Yes. It costs taxpayers money in several ways. Going through the process of enacting a law, having the state run the law, the necessary educational component to make the law effective and charging law enforcement agencies with carrying out the law. But I feel that benefits to be had with reduced idling far offset this. Although I do not think of this as a reason personally, people have expressed the concern of their individual rights being breached by an anti-idling law.

7.) If there was an anti- idling law in Vermont do you think people would follow it?

Initially, most people would not, mainly because they would not be aware of the law, just as it has been for other newly enacted laws such as pedestrian crosswalks, seat belt use, trash burning, etc. An educational component (signage, media, etc.) is a necessity for the success of these laws.

8.) What are some things individuals can do to make a difference?

To make a difference in reduced idling, individuals can limit idling when parked to 10-20 seconds; with few exceptions, limit warm up idling to 30 seconds, avoid using drive-throughs, avoid using remote vehicle starters and purchasing a hybrid vehicle, which seldom idles. To make a difference in raising awareness of idling, individuals can spread the word about idling to family and friends, write a letter to the editor of their newspaper, submit a blog entry to an appropriate forum, write their state and U.S. representatives and consider informing drivers of parked idling vehicles.

9.) Do you feel that Vermont is doing enough to protect our state against pollution caused by idling?

No.

10.)If Vermont had a law against idling how would our lives change if at all?

The quality of life of Vermonters would begin to improve (increasingly as more individuals were educated about idling under the law) with several significant benefits. Our health would improve, as there would be less exhaust to breathe. This in turn would lessen the burden on the healthcare system. Many tons of greenhouse gas emissions would be eliminated, reducing our impact on global climate change. Individuals would save money in fuel savings and the extended life of engine components. And there would be less noise pollution.

11.)What is the current legislation for car idling?

There is no Vermont state law for car idling, with the exception as deemed by school boards on school property as a component of the Act 48 law. The city of Burlington has what is currently a seasonal (April to November) anti-idling law. There is a bill in the legislature—H.143--that proposes an all motor vehicle idling law for Vermont; introduced in the 2007 legislative session; It has not been acted upon.

12.)In your opinion what needs to be done to help prevent individuals from idling?

I don't wish to prevent individuals from idling; I seek to restrict their idling. The most important thing is to educate on the state level. Even at least initially, if there were no law, this would be effective. Most effective, however, would be a law to back an educational effort.

13.)What are the cost savings of not idling?

The cost savings of not idling, as indicated in 10.), are lowered healthcare costs, lessening the costs associated with global climate change, fuel savings and extended life of engine components. I am not able to quantify these cost savings.

14.)Can a car be damaged from idling in cold weather?

The engine components of a car can be damaged from idling in cold weather and any other weather alike. As explained by Canada's federal Idle-Free Zone awareness campaign, an idling engine is not operating at peak temperature, resulting in incomplete fuel combustion. Fuel residues can condense on cylinder walls, contaminate oil and damage engine components. With more engine idling these residues tend to deposit on spark plugs. The resulting plug fouling can increase fuel consumption by 4 to 5 percent. Excessive idling can also cause water to condense in the vehicle's exhaust. This can lead to corrosion and reduce the life of the exhaust system.

Conversely, more frequent restarting associated with limiting idling can shorten the life of a starter motor and battery. However, the Idle-Free Zone states that this would cost \$10 annually, easily outweighed by the benefits to other engine components.

15.)How does idling harm our health?

The emissions of even today's modern vehicles contain carbon monoxide, nitrogen oxide, sulfur dioxide, benzene and several other toxic chemicals that impair our lungs and heart. Children, the elderly and people with respiratory ailments such as asthma, emphysema and bronchitis are especially at risk of becoming ill or having their conditions worsen.